

Warnham Historical Society

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Further Operation of the Poor Law in Warnham 1816-1846

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Our previous Contribution issued with our Newsletter in September 1980 dealt with the working of the Poor Law in Warnham in the 18th and early part of the 19th century. It explained how the problem of itinerant poor in the parish was met by resettlement, returning those not born or previously settled in the village to their original parish of settlement or birth so far as this could be established. But this was by no means the only responsibility of the Vestry in relation to its own native poor and this note describes some of the other matters with which the Vestry had to deal before and after the passing of the "Act for the Amendment and Better Administration of the Laws Relating to the Poor in England" in 1834, when the responsibility for the housing of the poor was centralised on a District basis in Unions under the Poor Law Commissioners.

Up to this time the poor in Warnham were housed in three tenements owned by the parish and situated on land where the butcher's shop and the adjacent houses, now 9-21 Church Street, are to-day. These stood in their own plot of land with an orchard and garden, where the poor could be put to work. The Work House was maintained at the cost of the parish at a rate levied by the Vestry and administered by the Overseers of the Poor. The Work House was managed in 1834 by a Mrs. Maria Owen at a wage of 5/-d. per week, with an allowance of 2/6d per head per week for the feeding of the paupers, the parish being responsible for providing clothes, firing, candles and soap for the house. Besides indoor relief like this, the parish also paid outdoor relief for paupers temporarily out of work, but also to live in their own homes.

The poor rate was determined by the Vestry and levied on the property owners in the parish. The cost of poor relief in the parish between the years 1816 and 1834 varied between £594 (1816) and £1,301 and £1,324 in 1818 and 1819, settling down thereafter to an average of about £900. 1832 and 1833 were also bad years when it exceeded £1,100.

Another concern of the Vestry was the annual arrangement for the children of paupers between the ages of about 10 and 14 years to be boarded out with local residents. In the years from 1824-32 an average of twenty children were boarded out with local yeoman farmers or craftsmen and in some cases with those from other parishes as far afield as Abinger and Dorking. The parish paid varying sums, ranging from 6d. up to 3/-d. per week for their keep and provided clothes and the cost of repairing shoes. The guardians were responsible for washing and the repair of clothes.

In addition the parish entered into apprenticeships for older poor children of both sexes, up to the age of 21 years, or marriage in the case of girls. The "Master" was responsible for providing "sufficient meat, drink and apparel, lodging, washing and other thought necessary for an apprentice". No payment was provided for and at the end of the apprenticeship the Master had to provide "Double apparel of all sorts, good and new, that is to say, a good new suit for the Holy Days and another for working days". Trades entered into including carpenter, joiner, tailor, cordwainer, husbandry and, in the case of girls, housewifery.

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 brought changes, many of them for the worse as it no longer became possible to provide outdoor work and wages for the able-bodied. The main provision was for the formation of a regional Union under a Board of Guardians on which the parish was represented. The conditions in the

Union Work Houses were to be made deliberately tough to discourage slacking and families became separated. The Warnham Work House and its land was sold and the inmates removed to Horsham and elsewhere, but not before it became the scene of a near riot when in December 1835 it was decided to remove some orphan children from Warnham to the Work House at Shipley. This place had a bad reputation, later shown to be fully deserved and there were fears that the children would be sent on to factories in the north. A mob led by the women of Warnham assembled in Horsham to protest and the Guardians and the Magistrates were threatened and chased from Normandy up the Causeway to the King's Head Hotel where carriage windows were broken. Troops were brought up to Horsham from Brighton and the Duke of Richmond, Lord Lieutenant of Sussex himself presided over the Magistrates and refused to rescind the order. Special constables were reluctantly sworn in, and the following week when the Poor Law officers came to Warnham to remove the children, they were man-handled and prevented from doing so until the following day, when they were accompanied by a detachment of dragoons with drawn swords.

The formation of the Horsham Union and the removal of the parish Work House however, did not relieve the parish of its financial responsibilities for helping the poor, and the rates continued to be levied by the Vestry, appropriate payments being passed on to the Guardians.

By agreement with the Guardians it was still possible for the Vestry to finance other local work from the funds. An instance was in 1842 when a Committee of the Vestry was formed to plan and oversee the lowering of the roadway over Bailing Hill to provide relief for the poor. We can see the result of this work to-day though there is no record in the Vestry Minutes as to how or by whom the work was finally carried out or its cost.

Under the Poor Law Amendment Act parishes were empowered to borrow money on the poor rate to assist emigration. In 1840 the Government was offering land in Australia at £1 per acre, and Henry Dendy, who at one time owned property in Rudgwick and Rowhook sold up all his property, and borrowed money to purchase eight square miles in New South Wales. This entitled him to nominate a number of persons of the labouring class for free passage to the colony. Amongst those who were nominated were a contingent from Warnham. In 1842 the Vestry was asked to assist in defraying the cost of fitting out and transporting these persons and their families to the port of departure. For this purpose the parish raised £133. They left in two batches in the "Earl of Durham" in February and the "Platina" in April for Port Phillip, Victoria as follows:-

February 1842 in "Earl of Durham".

George Petter, wife and 4 children
Edward Clark, wife and 2 children
Samuel Booker and wife
Samuel Charman (single)

April 1842 in "Platina"

Thomas Charman, wife and 4 children
Stephen Charman and wife
William Patching, wife and 3 children
Daniel Charman, wife and 2 children

In addition in January of that year a sum of £3 was given for John Booker, sponsored by a Mr. Weller of Capel, to fit himself out similarly for the trip to New South Wales.

Little is known of the fate of these Warnhamites but it seems that they may have fallen on hard times when they arrived. The economy of the Port Phillip District was in a deplorable state with galloping inflation and Dendy was unable to give them employment. He himself went bankrupt in 1845 having overstretched himself. But at least we know that some of the Charman family made good since

Charman House and Charman Avenue in Port Phillip were presumably named after one of them; Thomas Charman died in 1883 "very much respected generally by his neighbours and acquaintances". It would be very interesting to know if any relatives of these families are still living in Warnham.